

## In Memory Richard Proenneke 1917-2003

In 1968 at the age of 51 Richard (Dick) Proenneke constructed a log cabin at Upper Twin Lakes and lived there alone for almost 30 years. In 1980, Twin Lakes became part of the Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, and Dick became a volunteer backcountry interpreter and naturalist. A diesel mechanic by trade, decades of living in wilderness would transform Dick into what some might call a landscape ecologist. A keen observer and meticulous recorder, Dick was fascinated by weather phenomena, annual phenological events, cyclic natural fluctuations in animal abundance, and plant-animal interactions. Inquisitive and deliberate, he not only observed and recorded but also asked the question, “Why?”. A wolverine carcass found in spring at the head of a valley would be systematically probed for weeks. What was its sex and age? Was there evidence of emaciation or broken bones? Was the carcass in an avalanche zone?



In *A Sand County Almanac* Aldo Leopold wrote: *“Keeping records enhances the pleasure of the search, and the chance of finding order and meaning in these events.”* At Twin Lakes, Dick found order and meaning by recording natural events. He began recording his observations and measurements in 1968 and continued to do so until 1995, the last full year he spent at Twin Lakes. He wrote most of his notes on wall calendars, the type that rural Iowa hardware stores give to loyal customers at the start of the new year. Entries included dates of lake freeze-up; lake ice break-up; den entry and den emergence by brown bears; first calving by moose; first lambing by Dall sheep; and nest initiation by Gray Jays. Dick also recorded daily high and low air temperatures; monthly winter snow pack and lake ice thickness; and random events such as severe storms, earthquakes, and landslides. Dick had a special interest in wolves and annually recorded winter pack size, number of kills, and composition of kills.

Sustained and simple like the monitoring program we aspire to build, Dick’s calendars and journals are among the longest continuous data sets for any Alaska National Park. Trends in the duration of lake ice cover on Upper Twin Lake plotted from Dick’s records (1969-95) parallel those of other Northern Hemisphere sites and provide evidence that freshwater ecosystems are responding to a warming climate. Dick’s love for wilderness, passion for observing and understanding the natural world around him, and his dedication to keeping records are an inspiration to all of us as we develop and implement long-term monitoring in the Southwest Alaska Network.